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## HISPELLUM: A CASE STUDY OF THE AUGUSTAN AGENDA\*

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**Summary:** A survey of archaeological, epigraphic, and literary sources demonstrates that *Hispellum* is an adequate case study to examine the different stages through which Augustus' Romanization program was implemented. Its specificity mainly resides in the role played by the shrine close to the river *Clitumnus* as a symbol of the meeting between the Umbrian identity and the Roman culture.

**Key words:** Umbrians, Romanization, Augustan colonization, sanctuary, *Clitumnus*

The *Aeneid* shows multiple instances of the legitimization, as well as the exaltation, of the Augustan agenda. Scholars pointed out that Vergil's poetry is a product and at the same time the producer of the Augustan ideology.<sup>1</sup> In the "Golden Age" (*aurea saecula*) of the principate, the Romans became "masters of the whole world" (*rerum domini*), and governed with their power (*imperium*) the conquered people.<sup>2</sup> In his famous verses of the so-called prophecy of Jupiter, Vergil explained the process through which Augustus was building the Roman Empire: by waging war (*bellum gerere*), and by governing the conquered territories. While ruling over the newly acquired lands, Augustus would normally start a building program, and would substitute the laws and the customs of the defeated people with those of the Romans (*mores et moenia ponere*).<sup>3</sup>

These were the two phases of the process named as "Romanization" by historians, a process whose originally believed function has recently been challenged.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On this point, see the recent essay FLORES, E.: Cesare, Augusto e Virgilio. *Paideia* 67 (2012) 135–144.

<sup>2</sup> Verg. *Aen.* I 282; VIII 722.

<sup>3</sup> Verg. *Aen.* I 257–296.

<sup>4</sup> The essays collected in KEAY, S. J. – TERRENATO, N. (eds.): *Italy and the West: Comparative Issues in Romanization*. Oxford 2001 summarize the debate around the concept behind the word "Ro-

Scholars, for example, have sometimes disagreed on establishing to what extent each of the single different factors contributed to activate the Romanization of certain areas. Currently, however, many are willing to believe that the basis must have been Augustus' ability to promote consensus towards the new form of government that he was creating both in Rome and in the conquered territories. The consent did not need to immediately be spontaneous. The Roman revolution, prompted by Augustus, acted on two levels. On one side, it encouraged the upper class to want to share the Augustan political project, by inspiring in its members the confidence that they would play a major role in the process. At the same time, on the other hand, the army put in place a progressive aggregating force in the lower social classes.<sup>5</sup>

The result of this process might have already been perceptible between the end of the 1st century CE and the beginning of the 2nd century CE, and was enclosed in the definition of the Roman people that Tacitus outlined, namely "men who cannot bear either absolute slavery or absolute freedom".<sup>6</sup>

A major role in the achievement of this result was certainly played by the literary works of a few Roman authors, the *Aeneid* by Vergil being certainly the most important. The literary form was capable of universalizing events that would stay otherwise contingent, having also the ability to charge with symbolic content the events themselves, the places in which they occurred, and the individuals that caused them.

The scope of the Augustan agenda can be best appreciated by analyzing the individual regional contexts. The Italic peninsula is certainly a privileged observatory, given that the process of Romanization was engendered some time before Augustus came to power. The wars of conquest that occurred during the Republican age, the Social War, and the Triumviral colonization were the most important events of the relationship between Rome and the Italic territory.

The ancient world was not capable of conceiving Italy as a unit, but Augustus desired Italy's active participation in his already established agenda, as one can perceive by reading certain passages of his *Res Gestae*. In fact, he wrote that Italy in its entirety had sworn allegiance to him, and that it was in Italy that he had deducted colonies "which eventually became famous and crowded (*celeberrimae et frequentissimae*)".<sup>7</sup> It is by analyzing Augustus' Italic colonies that one can appreciate the actual meaning of Jupiter's prophecy contained in Vergil's verses.

The Augustan policy in the Italic peninsula was inspired by the same principles that guided other Romans (such as the Gracchi brothers and Caesar) in the previous century. The creation of colonies was often due to a constantly increasing demand for land, and was functional to fulfilling the need of governing the territory in a safe way.<sup>8</sup>

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manization," originally intended only as a product of Roman military conquests. In the last two decades, instead, scholars have reconsidered the importance of the role played by cultural aspects in the process, and the duration of its effects.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the meaning of the word "revolution" and the role played by the upper classes in the Romanization process, see SYME, R.: *Roman Revolution*. Oxford 1951<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Tac. *Hist.* I 16.

<sup>7</sup> August. *Res Gestae* 25, 28.

<sup>8</sup> Concerning the relevance of the issue of the land in the expansionism of the Roman state, see TOYNBEE, A. J.: *Hannibal's Legacy*. London 1965; with regards to the growing power of the Romans over

Moreover, Augustus was interested in encouraging the view of Italy as a unit under a single rule, while concurrently showing respect for the ethnic and territorial differences.<sup>9</sup>

In accordance with Augustus' policy, every colony was granted imperial benefits so that they might feel unique and more important than all of the others. This course of action was pursued whenever Augustus created a colony, regardless of its type. In fact, it was followed either in the case of a newly founded city, or in the case of a pre-existing city that would be eventually rewarded for its loyalty, or, finally, in the case of an old city of Greek origin.

Regarding the establishment of the colonies, Augustus decided to have some new foundations in geographical areas that were added later to the Roman domination, as in the case of *Augusta Taurinorum* or *Augusta Praetoria*.<sup>10</sup> In other cases, instead, the status of colony was granted as a benefit to cities already prosperous, and located in regions of ancient urbanization, as in the case of cities situated in Umbria or Emilia, such as *Ariminum*, *Pisaurum* or *Fanum Fortunae*.<sup>11</sup> Finally, in the South, the Augustan agenda dealt carefully with the proud tradition of the Greek territories, where Rome had to be cautious in granting autonomy to the conquered cities.<sup>12</sup> Capua, for instance, regained its independence under Caesar, and reached a great prosperity during the Augustan era; in the same period, Beneventum became a colony.<sup>13</sup>

Nowadays, every Augustan colony displays signs of the Romanization process. However, among all of the colonies, the town of *Hispellum*, today known as Spello, and sited in the Italian region of Umbria, not far from Perugia, figures as a good case study through which one can investigate the different steps of the Augustan agenda,

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the Italic peninsula, see BRUNT, P. A.: *Italian mainpower: 225 B.C.-A.D. 14*. Oxford 1971 and BISPHAM, E.: *From Asculum to Actium: the municipalization of Italy from the social war to Augustus*. Oxford 2007; for an assessment of the phenomenon of Roman colonization, see LAFFI, U.: *Colonie e municipi nello stato romano*. Roma 2007.

<sup>9</sup> LAFFI (n. 8) 116 states that the division itself of the Italic peninsula in different regions operated by Augustus might have been due to ideological reasons. Despite the geographical unity, encouraged by the Augustan agenda, the idea of an Italic unit was hardly conceivable in the ancient world, because of the persistent ethnic and cultural differences. On this issue, see GABBA, E.: Il problema dell' 'unità' dell' Italia romana. In *La cultura italica. Atti del Convegno della Società Italiana di Glottologia, Pisa 19–20 dicembre 1977*. Pisa 1978, 11–27.

<sup>10</sup> Information on *Augusta Praetoria*, founded in 25 BC, probably as outpost to conquer Western Europe, can be found in VAN ROYEN, R. A.: Colonia Augusta Praetoria and Augustus' cohortes praetoriae. *Talanta* 5 (1973) 48–71; even *Augusta Taurinorum*, being in the Alps, may be founded because of that reason, see: CRESCI MARRONE, G.: *Augusta Taurinorum città alpina?* In LEVEAU, PH. – REMY, B. (dir): *La ville des Alpes occidentales. Actes du colloque international « La ville des Alpes occidentales à l'époque romaine »*, 6–8 octobre 2006. Grenoble 2008, 357–370.

<sup>11</sup> As for *Ariminum* as *colonia Augusta Iulia Ariminensium*, see RAVARA MONTEBELLI, C. (a cura di): *Ariminum: storia e archeologia*. Roma 2006; concerning *Pisaurum*, colony re-founded in Triumviral age, see PACI, G.: *Pisaurum: sui magistrati della colonia*. *Picis* 18 (1998) 246–250; with regard to *Fanum Fortunae*, Augustan colony created in 27 BC, see PACI, G.: *Fanum Fortunae: note storiche ed epigrafiche*. *Picis* 24 (2004) 29–67.

<sup>12</sup> BISPHAM (n. 8) 407.

<sup>13</sup> As for the Romanization of Capua and of Italic region Campania, see FRANCIOSI, G. (a cura di): *La romanizzazione della Campania antica*. Napoli 2002; concerning Benevento, see TORELLI, M.: *Benevento romana*. Roma 2002.

based on historic and archaeological evidence. In fact, the Umbrians were one of the first Indo-European populations to dwell on the Italic peninsula.

Herodotus, in dealing with the Lydians' arrival on the Italic peninsula, employs the expression "Country of the Umbrians" as a topographical reference to refer in general terms to an area that includes the central and the northern Italian territories.<sup>14</sup>

Pliny the Elder shows to be aware of the ancient origin of the Umbrians, by explaining the meaning of their name, according to the Greek sources: the Umbrians received their name on account of the fact that they outlived a flood caused by the rains ("ombrioi", in fact, is the Greek word for the English "rains").<sup>15</sup>

By analyzing literary sources, references to *Hispellum* appear for the first time in the texts of Augustan authors, such as Livy and Silius Italicus, but the events reported do not date back past the Punic wars. Silius Italicus, for example, mentions *Hispellum* as one of the centers that was fighting against Hannibal, as if this town were part of some sort of Italic alliance.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, some of his lines make a reference to *Metaurus*, a famous warrior, who was probably from *Hispellum*.<sup>17</sup>

At first, the relationship between the Romans and the Umbrians was of a military nature: in the Battle of *Sentinum*, in 295 BCE, several Italic populations, including the Umbrians, joined forces against Rome, as Livy reports.<sup>18</sup> In the Umbrian valley, many ancient towns most likely became fortified, in the attempt of defending themselves.

Archaeological evidence, however, confirms that *Hispellum* has been constantly populated from the Iron Age up to the present day. Due to the presence of the *Via Flaminia*, the relationship between Rome and this land became, with time, more consistent.

*Hispellum* is significant also from a physical point of view. In fact, the whole valley is occupied by a large hydrographic system where two major rivers, *Clitumnus* and *Tinia* (both mentioned by Silius Italicus<sup>19</sup>), flowed, most likely favoring a certain prosperity of the local vegetation.<sup>20</sup>

Water has always had a strongly religious connotation, and, in fact, the examined territory provides evidence of the presence of local cults. In *Mevania*, near *Hispellum*, different inscriptions name the "Magistrates of Health" (*magistri Valetudinis*)<sup>21</sup> and, in some cases, also "The Nine men" (*Novemviri*),<sup>22</sup> both which relate to the local deity of "Health" (*Valetudo*), a goddess that eventually was superimposed on the Roman *Salus*, and that was connected with the celebration of triumphs.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Hdt. I 94.

<sup>15</sup> Plin. *NH* III 112.

<sup>16</sup> Sil. VIII 459.

<sup>17</sup> Sil. IV 186–187.

<sup>18</sup> Liv. X 30.

<sup>19</sup> Sil. VIII 451–452.

<sup>20</sup> Sil. VIII 456.

<sup>21</sup> *CIL* XI 5059 and 7926.

<sup>22</sup> *CIL* XI 5135.

<sup>23</sup> On the cult of the goddess *Valetudo*, see SISANI, S.: *Lucius Falius Tinia*, primo quattuorviro del municipio di *Hispellum*. *Athenaeum* 90.2 (2002) 483–505; LETTA, C.: I culti di Vesuna e di *Valetudo* tra

*Hispellum* became a Roman colony with the title of *colonia Iulia splendidissima*, as witnessed by the epigraphic sources.<sup>24</sup> The city appears to have received the title *Iulia* at the time of the first foundation of the colony, in the Triumviral age. Eventually, a second foundation by Augustus followed the first one.

Several reasons seem to support a re-foundation. Most likely, the colony of *Hispellum* was founded for the veterans of the thirteenth legion, and must have been connected with the events of the *bellum Perusinum*. In fact, its foundation appears to be a favor that Octavian granted to those who had supported him against his opponents.<sup>25</sup> With the second creation of the colony, a general reorganization of the whole territory took place, one that included probably the remaking of the *Via Flaminia* mentioned by the sources;<sup>26</sup> the “*pertica*” of *Hispellum* was also created through lands taken from nearby villages, as shown by the traces of centuriation, which are still visible. Accordingly, boundary stones found in the area are probably also relevant.

Another proof of the second foundation of the colony in the Augustan age is the thriving building activity during this period. Works in the walls, for example, showed that Augustus wanted to embellish a place that enjoyed his favor.<sup>27</sup> In the area of the Forum, some work was done on the bearing walls. Moreover, a temple in honor of Apollo was probably built, one whose presence is attested epigraphically, but unknown otherwise.<sup>28</sup> Archaeological investigations have also noticed the presence, in the same area, of traces of a house that was probably in use in the 1st century BCE.<sup>29</sup> Yet, the most significant work was done in the field of religious architecture.

According to what Augustus said in the *Res Gestae*, *Hispellum* seems ideologically close to Rome on account of the important role played by the religious buildings. In this era, in fact, one can witness the reorganization of the sanctuary that was located outside of the town, and that today is incorporated into a Renaissance villa known as *Villa Fidelia*. Inside this construction, so wide and so unique, there is a shrine, which was originally located in Mevania, and later assigned to *Hispellum* by Augustus. This federal shrine was formerly used in the celebration of the cult of *Vale-tudo*, as if this cult was a symbol of Umbrian unity.

During the work for the reorganization of the colony, Augustus assigned this sanctuary and its territory to *Hispellum*, as stated by Pliny the Younger.<sup>30</sup> This decision had a strong ideological value, for it looks as if Augustus, by means of this action, wished to take possession of what remained of the ancient nation of Umbria.

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Umbria e Marsica. In BONAMENTE, G. – COARELLI, F. (a cura di): *Assisi e gli Umbri nell'antichità: atti del convegno internazionale Assisi 18–21 dicembre 1991*. Assisi 1996, 317–339.

<sup>24</sup> *CIL* XI 5278.

<sup>25</sup> *CIL* XI 5275.

<sup>26</sup> August. *Res Gestae* 20.

<sup>27</sup> The walls had the character of a backdrop, see MANCONI, D. – CAMERIERI, P. – CRUCIANI, V.: *Hispellum: pianificazione urbana e territoriale*. In BONAMENTE–COARELLI (n. 23) 375–423.

<sup>28</sup> *CIL* XI 5261.

<sup>29</sup> As for the archaeological evidence, see MANCONI–CAMERIERI–CRUCIANI (n. 27) 381–392.

<sup>30</sup> Plin. *Ep.* VIII 8.

In the sanctuary of *Villa Fidelia*, there was also a temple to Venus, as attested by an epigraphic source in a mosaic.<sup>31</sup> The cult of the god *Clitumnus*, the tutelary deity of the river that runs through the area, was assimilated to Jupiter's. Augustus implanted in the sanctuary of *Villa Fidelia* (initially used for the celebration of local cults) the worship of two of the main Roman gods (Jupiter and Venus), thereby legitimizing his power in the region in two ways: by completing the process of Romanization, while at the same time respecting the local traditions of the people of this area.

The construction of the theater and, shortly after, of the amphitheater, with the subsequent establishment of the games, transformed the religious area of *Villa Fidelia* into one of the most important sanctuaries in the Roman world, an image of the imperial power that endured over time.

The city of *Hispellum*, after being transformed by the legal and building actions, became a topic for poets and other writers, contributing thus to universalize Augustus' work.

Its territory was certainly known to Vergil, who, while singing the *laudes* of Italy in the *Georgics*, recalls the tradition according to which *Clitumnus* had the power to make pure the animals intended for sacrifice.<sup>32</sup>

Even more interesting is the content of a letter that Pliny the Younger wrote to a man, identified by his first name *Romanus*. In this document, Pliny directly recognized the inhabitants of *Hispellum* as owners of the sanctuary, and of the place where the sanctuary stood.<sup>33</sup> Pliny's description mentioned all of the elements constituting the place, namely a spring (*fons*), a temple (*templum*) (which is symbolically defined as *priscum* on account of the fact that it comes from an ancient heritage), and, finally, the statue of a god wearing a *praetexta*, a sign of the fact that, despite his original and local name *Clitumnus*, he was considered a product of the Roman religion. Furthermore, Pliny notices the presence of other smaller temples (*sacella*) that were meant to nurture the cult (*veneratio*) of certain deities, and mentions the discovery of different *sortes* and oracular *tesserae*. His testimony is supported by the data of modern archaeological research.

In Pliny's letter, at first the region appears to be simply portrayed as an area of worship, but upon a closer inspection of his literary description, the same area seems to take on the mythical features of the *locus amoenus*: the type of vegetation, the presence of water, and the whole soul of the place (*animus loci*), were the elements of literary places generally deemed to escape the temporal dimension. Thanks to Pliny's lines, the work carried out by Augustus in the territory of *Hispellum* acquired a universal dimension, in the same way in which Rome became universal through the words of the *Aeneid*.

Hence, in the case study of *Hispellum*, one can find a practical confirmation of the effects of the prophecy by Jupiter contained in Vergil's lines: the expression "*bellum gerere*" indicates a way to conquer other ethnic groups on the Peninsula, while

<sup>31</sup> *CIL* XI 5264.

<sup>32</sup> Verg. *Georg.* II 146–148.

<sup>33</sup> Plin. *Ep.* VIII 8.

the clause “*mores moenia ponere*”, in the specific case of *Hispellum*, is exemplified by the building interventions as well as by the legislative and the administrative measures, which contributed to enforce the process of Romanization.

In addition, by looking at the case of *Hispellum*, one can actually assess with time the outcome of the process of Romanization. For, if Pliny the Younger describes *Hispellum* as a literary place, it means that in the 2nd century CE the ancient Umbrian territory became fully and deeply Roman.

Concluding, the case study of *Hispellum* helps ascertain the analytical steps of the process of Romanization that Augustus carried out in the Italic territory, and that can be summarized in the following way:

- (a) The identification of locations that had played an important role even before the Roman domination;
- (b) The concession of benefits to the selected location;
- (c) The realization of building interventions, in particular with the construction of infrastructure and public buildings in general, with a focus on the temples;
- (d) The assimilation of local cults into the Roman religion;
- (e) The recognition and celebration of the importance of the place chosen through literature, which could concur to transform the location into mythical places.

Generally, many of these steps can be recognized in all of the territories conquered by Rome, but what makes *Hispellum* an interesting case study of the Augustan agenda is the important role played by religion. In fact, the process of Romanization is carried out thanks especially to the shrine in which the signs of the Umbrian identity are preserved. It is actually this shrine that transforms this territory into a literary place.

If one studies other Augustan colonies, such as *Ariminum*, *Pisaurum*, *Fanum Fortunae*, *Capua* or *Beneventum*, they can recognize some steps of the Romanization process. In fact, all these colonies were created on famous and important territories, which had already been in connection with Rome, and in each of them, the colony status was granted along with the realization of building interventions.

In the case of *Fanum Fortunae*, the religious aspect was undeniably very important, and its basilica became the literary object of a description by Vitruvius.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Capua, especially by virtue of its tradition, appears as “the head of the cities” (*caput urbium*) in the literary sources.<sup>35</sup> However, none of these colonies, unlike *Hispellum*, can be a case study of the Augustan agenda, at least according to available sources.

Two factors contribute to make *Hispellum* an effective case study. First, the concrete perception of the relationship between the pre-Roman ethnic component and the Roman cultural element, and, second, the long span of time in which the relation-

<sup>34</sup> Vitr. V 1. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Flor. I 11.

ship between Rome and this ethnic group occurred, a relationship that remained unchanged until Constantine's times.

Based on the famous rescript from *Hispellum*, in fact, one can infer that Constantine favored *Hispellum* again, by bestowing the title of *Flavia Costans*, and by giving Umbria the right to celebrate the federal games in the city.<sup>36</sup> Constantine, therefore, as Augustus, recognized the sanctuary of *Hispellum* as a symbol of the meeting between the Umbrian identity and Roman culture.

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<sup>36</sup> *CIL* XI 5265. Nowadays, scholars are still studying the famous Constantinian rescript: the main point is the correct interpretation of the role played by the Umbrian priest. In fact, it is not clear if every year an Umbrian priest was appointed together with the Etruscan priest, or if every year there was a turnover among Umbrian and Etruscan priests, probably according to federal rules. On the issue, see PIGANIOL, A.: Notes épigraphiques. *REA* 21 (1929) 139–150; as for a recent review of the question, see CECCONI, G. A.: Il rescritto di Spello: prospettive recenti. In BONAMENTE, G. – LENSKI, N. E. – LIZZI TESTA, R. (a cura di): *Costantino prima e dopo Costantino. Constantine before and after Constantine*. Bari 2012, 273–290.